

Duxbury's Early Settlers: ✓

The Henry Howland grant

Henry Howland was the recipient of a grant of 80 acres or more in the Plymouth Colony Second Division of 1627. He acquired the property sometime in the late 1630s, and was accorded the 80 acres because, we believe, as a family of four, he, his wife, and two children were to receive 20 acres each. Henry eventually had at least eight children, four sons and four



BY LAMONT "MONTY" HEALY

daughters.

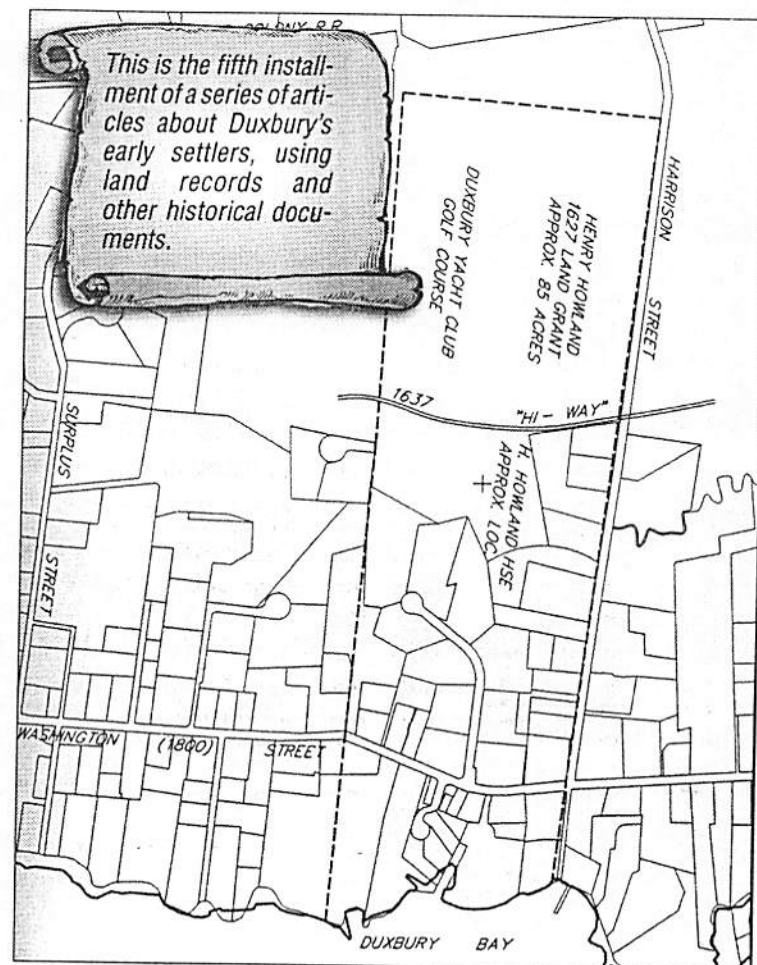
Henry was John Howland's brother. John was the man washed overboard on the Mayflower during a furious storm. In Governor Bradford's words, "It pleased God that he caught hould of ye halliards which hunge over board and rane out at length; yet he was held up... and then with a boat hooke and other means got into the ship again."

Brother Henry and some of his offspring were rebellious concerning the church. Although considered a noble man, he and his children often times ran afoul of the church for failing to pay their portion of assessed fees. In some instances the constable would confiscate some of their animals to compensate. Even back then, you couldn't get away with not paying your taxes.

Henry Howland died in 1671 and left the homestead farm to his eldest son, Joseph. Joseph endured several seizures by the constable, twice in 1679 for not contributing to the building of the meeting house, and again in 1681, 1683 and 1685 for other offenses. Joseph died in 1692, leaving the property to his only son, Jedediah, and his daughter Patience.

The next owner of the property was Samuel Sprague of Marshfield, who bought the property from Jedediah Howland in 1708. One notable "exception" in this deed was "so much of the upland of the house lot as contains the graves of Henry Howland and Joseph Howland ye grandfather and father of ye grantor with others related to them." It appears that wherever the bodies were buried, and I don't think anybody does know, that small part of the property was excepted from the transfer.

It is important, and I hope interesting, to briefly cover the Sprague families, and there were two of them that settled in Duxbury. The Samuel Sprague of Marshfield was the son of William Sprague of Hingham. William Sprague was the youngest of three brothers, Ralph, Richard and William, who arrived in Salem in 1629. They first settled in Charlestown, and William moved on to Hingham. The significant fact about this Sprague family is that it is not related to



Francis Sprague, pilgrim, who settled near what is now Hall's Corner.

Francis Sprague was the keeper of the "ordinary" (tavern) as was his son, John, who married Ruth Bassett, a neighbor. Ruth later became Ruth (Bassett) Sprague Thomas Prince Sylvester (married four times – must have been a remarkable woman). They had at least six children (and she later had more). Her three Sprague sons were John, William and

Samuel, so both branches of the Sprague families had a Samuel and John who were contemporaries, which has led to some confusion in the Duxbury records. (Yours truly not excepted.) By about 1710 John and William had relocated to Lebanon, Conn. and Samuel moved to Rochester, Mass.

These events led to there being only the Hingham/Marshfield branch of the Sprague surname left in Dux-

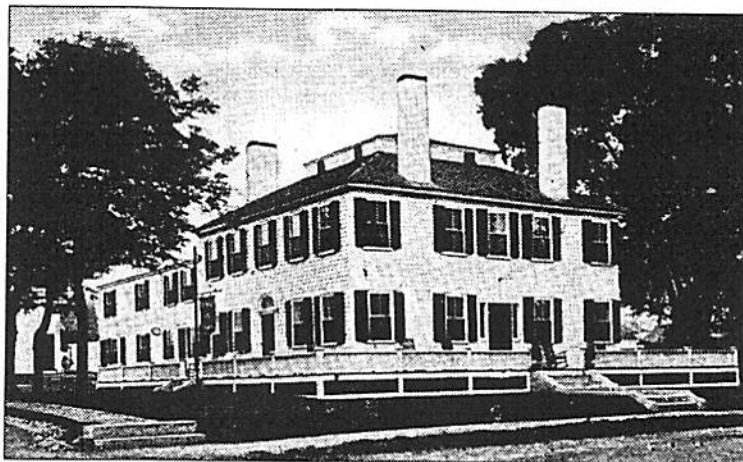
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bury. Although the two branches of the family could have been separate for hundreds of years, they did get "together again" right here in Duxbury. Mercy Chandler, daughter of Nathaniel Chandler and Zeruiah Sprague, a descendent of Francis Sprague, married Peleg Sprague a descendent of William Sprague of Hingham in 1746. After Peleg died in 1754, she married his cousin, Phineas. Their first and only son was the Honorable Seth Sprague, a much respected man in the community.

To continue the chain of title, Samuel Sprague, Senior, settled on the farm in 1708; he was married to Sarah Chillingworth and they had eight children. When Samuel Sr. died in 1710 he left the property, which now comprised 230 acres, to his two sons, Samuel Junior and John. The property was referred to as Spragues Neck.



A photo of the Seth Sprague mansion, which later became a hotel. At the time of this picture it was called the "Bayside Inn" (1912-1923).

The property started at what is known as Sprague's wharf, followed north along the shore to the Blue Fish River, up the river to John Alden's, by land of Jacob Smith, then was bounded on the west by the sites of the village schoolhouse and the Methodist Church, then by the land of Daniel Glass and back to Sprague's wharf. The two farms were divided by the road, then called the "east-west" road (now Harrison Street).

The farm on the south side of the road was to be occupied by Samuel Sprague, Jr. and that on the north side was to be occupied by his brother, John. Samuel, Jr. is frequently mentioned as moderator of town meeting. He married Bethia Thomas and they had four children Phineas, another Samuel, Sarah and Bethia.

Phineas Sprague, who as we mentioned above, married his cousin Peleg's widow, Mercy (Chandler) and now lived on the southerly portion of the property below Harrison Street, left the farm in 1775 to his only son, the Hon. Seth Sprague when Seth was 15.

Seth Sprague became the



ABOVE: Seth Sprague's barn, which is now the clubhouse at the Duxbury Yacht Club.

RIGHT: A plaque at the barn.

This building was built circa 1780 as the barn of the Seth Sprague farm. It was acquired by John K. Parker in 1879 and by the Duxbury Yacht Club in 1915. The barn was remodeled as the golf-tennis house in 1938 in honor of William L. Benedict, Commodore 1917. The architect for the project was William B. Coffin, Commodore 1939-1940.

most noted of the Sprague family. Seth served as a private in the Continental Army when he was 16. At the expiration of his term, he returned to Duxbury and engaged in shore fishing. This was a somewhat hazardous occupation due to the many English ships and privateers cruising the coast. Seth married Deborah Sampson at age 19 and they spent the next 65 years on the family farm raising their 15 children. They had four sons and 11 daughters (all of whom lived to adulthood and married).

Like the previous owners of this property (the Howlands) Seth, Sr. was often at odds with the church (First Parish Church). He resigned from that church and became a benefactor of the Methodist church and it appears that after some disillusionment he provided property for St. John's Episcopal Church. He was elected and served for 27 years in the State Legislature, House and Senate. He was twice chosen to be a member of the Electoral College, deciding on the choice of president and vice president.

Seth Sprague, Jr. built a house for himself, his wife, Welthea, and family on his father's property in 1813 although a deed to this portion of the property was not provided until 1831. This house is the mansion that sits on the southerly corner of the intersection of Harrison Street and Washington Street and is now

a condominium. Washington Street was relatively new, having been built in 1800, largely through the efforts of Seth, Sr. and others, mostly to accommodate the ship builders and associated businesses.

In 1872 the fine old mansion became a hotel. Then in 1879 the hotel was passed to John T. Winsor and it became the Winsor Hotel. The hotel was bought by the Hon. Joseph O. Burdett (1889), then went to Mrs. F. V. Hunt (1894), who renamed it the Brunswick House. Maurice Chandler acquired the property in 1912. Some say he won it in a poker game (no paper trail on that!) He did have a small house next to the livery stable, which was used for gambling. Eddie Loring attests to that in Margery L. MacMillan's book "Stopping Places Along Duxbury Roads." Mr. Chandler renamed the hotel The Bayside Inn and remained in business until 1923. The house was converted into apartments in 1960.

As for most of the rest of the property it passed from the Spragues to Mr. John K. Parker (1879) who sold it to the Duxbury Yacht Club in 1915. To

this day, Seth Sprague Senior's barn is the major portion of the DYC club house. And for you golfers, remember when you are playing holes number 15 and 16 you are on Henry Howland's 1627 land grant.

As to the naming of the streets, Harrison Street was named for William H. Harrison (hero of Tippecanoe during the French & Indian War) when he was campaigning for President. Gershom Bradford an ardent Whig supporter had a sign with a likeness of William H. Harrison by the side of the road (Tremont Street). Because it "spooked" some horses, the town made him take it down. In response, Bradford named the street Harrison Street. Washington Street was approved by town meeting in 1798, shortly after President Washington's term in office ended.

Notable descendents of Henry Howland include Presidents Nixon and Ford, strange that they would be two presidents so inextricably connected.